THE USES OF ADVERSITY

"I WISH I could slide along in business as easily as George Seagrave," said John Nelson, as he joined his father in the library after dinner.

"What's up now?" asked his father.

"Oh, nothing," replied the son, "only George has just been appointed assistant general manager of his father's firm. It doesn't seem right for a fellow to have an advantage like that given to him, while fellows like me have to dig for everything they get."

"But that seems to be the way the world is made, John, and the more I see of it the more I'm convinced it's a capital arrangement. I used to feel as you do, but I've lived long enough to see a great many things adjust themselves. There is a law of compensation at work, my boy, and no class has all the advantages. It would be a very poor world if we all slid along as easily as George does."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the son.

"Just this: it takes opposition or hardship, or whatever you please to call it, to bring out the best in us and make us good for anything. You know the old saying, 'It's three generations from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves.' A man goes out in his shirt sleeves and gets his living, but he decides that his children shall have more opportunity than he, so he gives them an education. The sons make money by their educational advantage, and they pass it on to their sons, who have never known the struggle of acquisition. The sons' sons go through it. And so the shirt-sleeve process begins again. It doesn't always happen so, but it happens with sufficient regularity to form the basis of a proverb. The exception proves the rule."

"Yes, but it needn't be so," replied the boy.

"I know that," replied the father, "but there is enough truth in it to prove what I want to say. Even God himself put the Jews through the process of adversity to whip them into shape. It was only about four hundred miles in a bee line across the wilderness. But God made the Jews take forty years to get to Canaan, because He wanted to toughen them and make them ready for the conquest, when He got them there. The Bible says He 'led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.' They would have got there too quickly to stand the hardship. And if they *had* defeated the Philistines, they would have been unprepared for a still worse enemy; I mean the opulence and plenty of Canaan.

"Men are defeated by easy victories and cheap successes more than by adversities. Disraeli was hissed down in the British Parliament when he made his maiden speech. But that only toughened his fibre and stiffened his resolve. Grant's reverses were the school in which he learned how to win his later victories. It makes all the difference whether a closed door is a final rebuff or an invitation to battle through. I'm more afraid of a cheap and easy success for you than I am of struggle. If you struggle before you achieve, you will have character to hold you steady when success arrives. The trouble with many persons is that they have no character to go with their acquisitions. It is a case of diamonds on dirty fingers.

"Have you never seen an engine pounding itself to pieces on a slippery rail in winter? What it needed was sand, opposition. Friction spelled progress. Even a kite can't rise *with* the wind. It must ascend against it. Don't spend your time quarreling with the order of things or fretting about some one else's easy success. An oak grows in the open, tortured by a thousand storms. The hothouse plant never knows the glory of the sky."